

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 TEL AVIV 006113

SIPDIS

INFO AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

STATE FOR IIP/G/NEA - TERRY SCOTT
STATE FORINFO NEA/IPA AND NEA/PPD MQUINN/, JSMITH/,
DBENZE, NEA/IPA
STATE INFO

JERUSALEM PASS ICD DANIELS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS KPAO KMDR PREL PGOV IS MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAELI MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE U.S.
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

1. Summary: The Israeli media followed the U.S. Presidential elections with great interest. From the campaign through to the aftermath, commentators focused their attention on several issues: the prospects for changes in U.S.-Israel policy, the likelihood of broader changes in U.S. policy in the Middle East, and the impact of the Jewish vote in the United States. End summary.

2. The 2004 U.S. Presidential elections attracted a great deal of interest among the Israeli media. As Israel's most important strategic and political ally, the U.S. is typically followed quite closely in the Israeli press. From the primary campaigns, and particularly since the two party conventions, Israeli media covered the elections with great interest. Coverage of the campaign and the elections was almost daily, with both factual reporting and commentary/analysis provided by journalists of all levels, academics, experts in various fields, former ambassadors, and a very strong contingent of Israeli correspondents in the U.S.

Coverage of the campaign - Run-up to the Run-off

23. The 2004 U.S. Presidential elections attracted a great deal of interest among the Israeli media. As Israel's most important strategic and political ally, the U.S. is typically followed quite closely in the Israeli press. By the Democratic and Republican Party conventions this summer, coverage of the campaign in the Israeli media had become almost daily, with both factual reporting and commentary/analysis provided by journalists of all levels, academics, experts in various fields, former ambassadors, and a very strong contingent of Israeli correspondents in the U.S. In addition to reporting on campaign activity, the Israeli media focused on several key areas of U.S. policy and the prospective impact of the election on these areas: the U.S.-Israel bilateral relationship, Middle East policy, U.S. relations with Europe, and the U.S. economy.

3. In terms of the U.S.-Israel bilateral relationship, the Israeli media overwhelmingly agreed that the first Bush administration had been a good friend to Israel. "Conventional wisdom in Israel," wrote a senior columnist from pluralist Yediot Aharonot on November 1, "is that Bush was and will be the ideal American president from Israel's perspective. The best there is. Israel has no interest in seeing him replaced, and it has every interest in seeing him reelected." Most commentators agreed, however, that both candidates shared a political record of support for Israel - for better or for worse. A senior columnist for left-wing Ha'aretz observed on October 18 that "regardless of whether Bush is reelected or John Kerry takes his place, there will be no 'pressure' from America" in terms of U.S.-Israel relations.

4. Journalists also felt that regardless of the outcome of the elections, they were likely to mark the end of a lull in Middle East policy. A diplomatic correspondent for Ha'aretz noted on October 22 that "The elections in the United States are fast approaching, and the diplomatic arena is waking up and issuing calls to increase international involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has vanished from both candidates' agendas. Once again the familiar slogans are surfacing, about how stability and quiet in the land of Israel are essential to the security of the entire world, and about how the time has come to

implement the international road map plan and get on with the establishment of the Palestinian state alongside Israel. [...] The publication of the disengagement plan and the close race in the elections in the U.S. have afforded Israel a year of relative freedom from international pressure. [...] Now the moment of truth is approaching." In early November, many newspapers published articles citing a Ministry of Foreign Affairs report on the likely outcome of the election, and the implications of that outcome for both Israel and the Middle East.

154. Particular attention was also paid in the Israeli press to the Jewish vote in the U.S., especially in the English-language newspapers. An October 22 editorial in left-wing Ha'aretz claims that "as the election wooing demonstrates, the Jewish vote has not lost its force. And it seems that more than ever before, the world is keeping an eye on the Jewish vote." In response to the question "So for whom should a Jew in America vote?" raised in a front-page article in Ha'aretz on October 22, the author points out that "the safest vote, in terms of Israel, is a vote for Bush." The Israeli media closely tracked exit poll results, reporting on November 4 that President Bush had received 22 percent of the Jewish vote. Several newspapers front-paged their analyses of these results, sharing the opinion that Bush's perception as the more pro-Israel of the two candidates had a great deal to do with his 3 percentage point increase among Jewish voters. Ha'aretz quoted a Jewish voter in Brooklyn, NY as saying "I don't see how any Jew could not support Bush." The Jewish communities in swing states such as Florida, Pennsylvania, and Ohio were also covered; as Ha'aretz noted on November 4, "had [the Kerry campaign] only persuaded a number of Jewish retirees [...] in southern Florida, Massachusetts senator John Kerry would have been elected president."

----- --
(Maybe a Subtitle Here on Absentee
Voting???"Unprecedented Voter Turnout among
Expatriates"
----- --

165. Coverage was also given, particularly in the English-language press, to the sizable American-Israeli community and the logistical issues surrounding absentee voting, for which eligible voters in Israel registered in record numbers this year. Throughout most of September and October, the organizations representing the two parties in Israel, Democrats Abroad and Republicans Abroad, also ran advertisements in the English-language dailies on a regular basis reminding readers to register for absentee ballots and announcing events at which eligible voters could come to fill out applications for absentee ballots. Both organizations reported unprecedented interest in absentee voting this year. ((Is there any info on problems that absentee voters here had? It might be interesting to note either way, given the coverage the issue received in other countries. Just a thought.))A Ha'aretz article from October 29 observed that "Estimates for the number of votes cast from Israel vary, but even the lowest account - some 30,000 votes - is more than double the voter turnout four years ago. Some estimates for the upcoming elections go as high as 60,000 ballots." The two major English-language dailies, Jerusalem Post and Ha'aretz's English edition, both paid close attention to difficulties experienced by would-be absentee voters who did not receive their requested ballots in time to vote. Both newspapers noted the extremely high demand for the Federal Write-In Absentee Ballot this year, and cited both in articles and in paid advertisements that the American Citizen Services units of the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv and the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem offered extended hours to address the "increased demand for voter assistance."

----- --
November 2-3: Intense Coverage in the Electronic Media
----- --

176. The electronic media also showed great interest in the U.S. elections. Although three channels (Channels 1, 2, and 10) have Washington-based correspondents, they all in addition sent top journalists to cover other angles of the elections, such as showing coverage of the results from Kerry's headquarters in Boston. Most of these journalists left for the U.S. at least a week in advance of the elections and broadcast daily reports from the country. On the day of the elections (November 2) all TV stations had extensive reports on their daily TV news shows covering the election results, including interviews with people on the

streets, and footage from the U.S. and different experts. At 10:00pm local time Channel 1 held a special program, "America is Choosing," and Channel 2 had a "special U.S. elections" program. Coverage resumed early on the morning of November 3. All three channels had special U.S. elections programs that began at 06:00am local time and lasted for at least three hours. This coverage of the results continued throughout the day with special news bulletins and extended news programs. All the news programs included round tables hosting U.S. experts, the station's various commentators, Israeli officials; the topics discussed were U.S.-Israeli relations; Arab world response, Middle East peace process and more. Local radio stations (Israel Radio and IDF Radio) extensively reported on the results as they came in during their regular morning news shows. The stations hosted experts and aired their analyses of all possible scenarios, discussing the technicalities of the Electoral College, the rules surrounding Ohio's provisional ballots, etc.

"The Sigh of Relief in Jerusalem"

187. Commentary on the results of the U.S. elections began on November 4 and remained a major topic for several days before being eclipsed by news related to Yasser Arafat's health. The media generally agreed that Israeli officials were relieved to learn of Bush's re-election. Senior columnists for pluralist Yediot Aharonot wrote that "When it became clear that [Bush] would remain in the White House for another four years, many figures in the political establishment allowed themselves a broad smile of relief." A senior analyst for the mass-circulation daily Maariv wrote that "The sign of relief in Jerusalem yesterday was heard all the way to Washington." In his front-page analysis in left-wing Ha'aretz, Aluf Benn observed that "Prime Minister Ariel Sharon gambled big time on George Bush, and wasn't disappointed. Sharon maintained a public distance from the U.S. presidential campaign, focusing in recent months on domestic matters, but everyone knew which candidate had his vote. The alliance with Bush was the cornerstone of Sharon's policy from the day he took office, and he stuck to it."

198. Most commentary explored the implications of Bush's re-election for U.S. policy in the Middle East, noting that the tenor of the relationship between the U.S. and Israel would be subject to change. "Senior political sources believe that Bush, in his second term of office, free from the shackles of the Jewish vote, will be much more involved in events of the Middle East," wrote senior columnists Itamar Eichner and Orly Azulai of Yediot Aharonot. "The political sources fear that Bush could try to rehabilitate his relations with Europe and the Arab world and buy quiet in Iraq - at Israel's expense." Senior analyst Ben Caspit of Maariv concurred: "We have won, but now we will pay dearly for it, because George Bush in his second term could be much more dangerous than George Bush in his first. It should not be forgotten that Bush's love affair with Sharon came late, and not before Bush had wagged his finger and threatened quite a few times.. Throughout his first term in office Bush was planning how he would get to his second. He knew he would need Jewish money and votes. Now, throughout his second term, he will be planning how he is going to go down in history. To make history he has to get out of Iraq honorably, win the war on terrorism, and reduce tension in America. Of course, he will not be able to do all of that by himself. Bush will have to mend his bridges with the world, to conciliate with Europe, and to prove to the Moslem world that he has not declared a crusade against it. The price tag for all these initiatives is simple: pressure on Israel. Bush can deliver the goods at our expense, and the pressure on him to do so will be considerable."

109. Reflecting a more skeptical minority view from the left, commentator Ben-Dror Yemini of Maariv went further, suggesting that a more demanding U.S. policy would be a good thing for Israel: "Bush's total support for Sharon does not help us to achieve the important Zionist aim of a democratic Jewish state. A little more American pressure on the issue of the settlement outposts would help us in the struggle against the creeping realization of "Greater Palestine" of [...] "Greater Israel." ." ((Ruth Anne - i realize this is a quote but it does not actually make sense to say both "Greater" here. Maybe paraphrase would be clearer? But America's complacency is leading to two consequences: first, it has given the establishment of new outposts a tail wind, and secondly, it has

exacerbated hostility toward the United States. The West has to support Israel. But the West is divided, partly thanks to Bush. We would be better served by a West united in support for Israel on the basis of a two-state solution, one of th~~at~~ is ((same here)) Jewish and democratic,[...] than a fragmented West in which Bush remains president and consequently that solution becomes even more remote."

11. Comment: The intense scrutiny paid to the U.S. Presidential elections by the Israeli media is reflective of nothing more or less than the vital importance that Israel attaches to its relationship with the United States. The broad range of commentary on the campaign and the elections simply amplified the ongoing discussion in the Israeli media about the nature of this relationship. End comment.

CRETZ